

TOP SECRET/NODIS/EYES ONLY

June 27, 1969

DOS, ARMY reviews
completed.

MEMORANDUM FOR

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

SUBJECT: Your Draft Message for Ambassador Bunker

The President has reviewed the attached draft cable. While agreeing to the need for a plan for the contingency described, he wants no proposals made to Thieu until Thieu has had an opportunity to complete his political proposal. At that time, the President plans to undertake a full National Security Council review of the options.

15
Henry A. Kissinger

Attachment

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

TOP SECRET/NODIS/EYES ONLY

TS-HK445

DRAFT

TOP SECRET

ACTION: Amembassy SAIGON

STATE _____

NODIS/EYES ONLY

For Bunker from the Secretary

1. The establishment of the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) is quite clearly intended by the Communists to be a major and significant event. Examining this move in the context of the overall Communist strategy both on the battlefield and at the conference table, we have concluded that it is an important step in the direction of emphasizing political, rather than military, action as a central element of future Communist activity.
2. While available evidence is far from conclusive, there are some indications that the Communists, by not repeat not replacing their casualties, may be prepared to let their military strength diminish somewhat by attrition. If intelligence to this effect is correct, they could afford to do this only if their reliance on the military thrust of their effort will diminish in the future.

EA:WHSullivan/C:RFPedersen:ms 6/17/69

EA - Mr. Green

S/S

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

2

3. On the other hand, there is a considerable requirement for the PRG, if it is to be taken seriously and used as a major instrument in the political process, to gain and hold territory which it can claim as its own. It is hardly to be expected that the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Poland, and other such nations would name Ambassadors accredited to the PRG who would spend their time cringing in caves or underground bunkers in the jungles of Tay Ninh, always subject to capture or destruction by U.S. and Allied forces. They must have some location that they can call a "capital," where they can reside, as they did in Khang Khay during the Laos fighting in 1960-62.

4. The problem of gaining an invulnerable piece of territory and a "capital", while at the same time relying less on military forces, would pose a real dilemma for the PRG. Even if greater reliance were to be placed upon military force, it is quite improbable to expect that a truly secure territory could be held, safe from the destructive power of U.S. air strikes, mobile infantry, and the general ability of U.S. and Allied forces to penetrate anywhere in South Viet-Nam, if a decision is made to do so.

5. It would therefore appear that a way out of this dilemma might be for the PRG to call for a cease-fire and military standstill. We

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

3

conclude that there is some prospect that such a call might be made, even though the last private talks indicate NVN thinking at that time to be a cease-fire after conclusion of an agreement. Viewing the PRG in the light of Point 5 of the NLF 10 point program, we consider that such a call for cease-fire would be linked with the demand for a coalition government. We consider it likely that several non-committed "neutralist" Vietnamese personalities, particularly among the overseas exiles, may have already been prepared for a willingness to respond to such a call for a coalition arrangement with the PRG, and that a major effort will be made to use the PRG as the element around which such a coalition would be structured. Some of the more hard-line (and therefore least presentable) members of the PRG might be proposed for sacrifice, as the condition for a similar "sacrifice" by members of the GVN. The purpose of this maneuver would be to create a "provisional coalition government" divested of all significant members of both the GVN and the PRG and centered mainly around a weak group of amenable "neutralists."

6. Such a proposal, coming from the PRG at this time, would cause us serious problems. Political sentiment in this country, articulated through powerful voices in both branches of our Congress, and

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

4.

supplemented by broad support from outside the United States would make it difficult for us to reject a call for a cease-fire. We feel that a cease-fire in and of itself would be manageable, but we also assume that the PRG proposal will be put forward as an "inseparable package." We would then be faced with the difficult task of attempting to "break" the package, in the face of political pressure on us, both domestic and international to accept it in order to end the war. We also assume it might be timed to coincide with the Communist "summer offensive", during which U.S. casualty figures would be steadily climbing as a result of deliberate enemy targetting. Such a situation would be designed to maximize friction between us and the GVN, as well as to force us into negotiations on Communist terms.

7. We have considered possible steps which might be taken to preempt such a move and suggest the following as one we think worth considering:

8. It would be proposed that President Thieu, after minimum consultation with his key associates, issue a call for elections, and a cease-fire in the following terms:

A. "The Communists have, in recent days, enacted the farce of constituting themselves into a so-called Provisional Revolutionary Government. Although this government has neither territory, nor a

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

5.

capital, nor any popular support except from among its own ranks, a small number of nations have recognized it, and apparently accept the pretension that it has the attributes of support which it claims.

B. "In order to expose the true attitudes of the people of SVN to the world at large, I think it is only appropriate that the people of South Viet-Nam be given an opportunity to express themselves freely on the subject. I therefore propose that a clear choice be offered the people of South Viet-Nam in the form of a referendum. The subject on the ballot should be the one direct question 'Which do you accept as governing system of South Viet-Nam, that of the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam, or that of the Provisional Revolutionary Government?' as it now calls itself.

C. "To assure that voting on such an issue is honest and free, I would propose that it be supervised by representatives of mutually acceptable nations who wish to participate in an observer group, organized, perhaps, by the United Nations, with provisions for equitable membership of each state. I would also propose that the arrangements and the rules for voting be worked out ^{directly} ~~between~~ between the two sides, through our representatives who are currently seated at the negotiating table in Paris.

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

6.

D. "Moreover, in order to make this exercise of free democratic expression accessible to all the citizens of South Viet-Nam, I propose the institution of a cease-fire or a series of local cease-fires immediately upon the achievement of an agreement to settle the political future by such a vote of the populace. My representatives are ready to meet, as of today, with designated representatives of the other side to arrange the terms of such a cease-fire or cease-fires. These representatives could convene at some location acceptable to both sides, such as in the southern half of the Demilitarized Zone.

E. "It should be understood in advance that both sides will be prepared to abide by the consequences of this popular referendum. For my part, and on behalf of my Government, I can state that, if the popular will repudiates our system and prefers the system of the other side, we will accept that mandate and act accordingly.

F. "I make these proposals earnestly, with the sincere conviction that they are for the good of the people of my country, and in the profound hope that they will be supported by men of good will everywhere in this world. ~~We would be prepared to abide by the results of such a vote if the other side is likewise~~ I await with eager attention the reply of the other side."

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

7.

9. The United States would then promptly endorse Thieu's proposal and would undertake a diplomatic and information campaign designed to obtain maximum support for it throughout the world. We believe that it would place a heavy onus on the other side. We have doubts that the other side would accept the proposals, but we believe we can use the pressures they generate to press for truly serious negotiations on terms which would be congenial to us.

10. It would be our intention to have you arrange an appointment with Thieu as soon as possible, rehearse with him the arguments contained in the first five paragraphs of this telegram and propose to him the text of the statement contained in paragraph 8. We expect that your initial approach will meet with considerable resistance, but wish you to stress to Thieu the serious consequences we might have to face if the Communists were to make the first move by proposing a cease-fire coupled with a coalition.

11. We also assume that Thieu might raise with you the prospect that the Communists would, indeed, accept his proposal for a cease-fire, while at the same time rejecting the proposal for a referendum. Such a response would be calculated to give them their "territory," or at least their "capital," probably in some obscure southern town, but would

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

8.

leave them free from the humiliating exposure that would result from a popular referendum.

12. If Thieu raises this point, you would tell him that we have considered this possibility and recognize it as a genuine potential. In our view, if the terms are right, it would be an acceptable situation, and we would be prepared to go into immediate talks to conclude a supervised cease-fire. We feel that a cease-fire which took place in the current military balance, with the negotiating initiative on our side, and with the Communists on the defensive politically and psychologically, would leave us in an advantageous posture. From this position, we would feel able to carry forward negotiations towards a political solution by elections with confidence and with a broad base of public support both in the United States and throughout the world.

13. You would, of course, stress to Thieu the absolute need for secrecy in this matter. Only a handful of people in Washington are aware of this proposal. If any hint should reach the Communists that we are attempting to pre-empt them on this issue, they might in turn move to pre-empt us. Therefore, Thieu's ability to consult with his colleagues would have to be extremely limited both as to the numbers consulted and the time over which such consultations can take place.

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

9.

14. If Thieu should agree in principle with this proposal, we would wish you to work out a date with him in the near future which would be occasion on which he would make his statement. We believe his consultations should take place in the span of just a few hours prior to the time when his statement is scheduled.

15. Our own internal consultations on this matter would be similarly limited here. We would have to consider any suggestions or modifications that Thieu or you may have in a small circle of advisers, but we would not repeat not contemplate any staff planning at all on the consequences of this proposal. We would consult with our Allies in the most limited way feasible.

16. In summary, we feel we are faced with a risky situation which justifies pre-emptive action. That action itself is not without risks. On balance, however, we feel the risks which it entails are not only manageable, but provide us with the prospect of a net advantage. We realize we would be confiding a most delicate assignment to you and that its delicacy is compounded by the extreme requirements for security. We regret we cannot repeat not authorize you to consult on this matter with your colleagues, but request your views on the details of the proposal we are contemplating for you to make to Thieu.

GP-1

END

TOP SECRET